

## **Children's Leadership Council of Michigan**

*Business Leaders Committed to Investment in Early Childhood.*

May 11, 2012

Representative Kenneth Kurtz  
Michigan House of Representatives  
P.O. Box 30014  
Lansing, MI 48909-7514

Dear Chairman Kurtz and fellow members of the Family, Children and Seniors Committee,

As the committee considers HB 5572 – a bill to support home visiting programs – we are writing to urge the committee and the full Michigan Legislature to continually strengthen efforts to assure the healthy growth of 0-3-year-olds.

The Children's Leadership Council of Michigan is a diverse network of statewide business leaders who firmly believe that our state must act with new commitment and urgency to ensure that all Michigan children arrive at school ready to succeed. We believe that early childhood initiatives are among the most responsible, high-return strategies our state can pursue toward a talented, globally competitive future workforce.

A high-quality, globally competitive workforce depends on talented learners. One early key marker of student success is grade-school reading proficiency. And grade schoolers become proficient readers if they enter kindergarten healthy and ready to learn.

Many of Michigan's children are not on this clear path to prosperity. To improve the prospects of Michigan's youngest children, we advocate for the expansion of publicly funded preschool. And we advocate the strengthening of evidence-based programs for 0-3 year-olds, particularly home visiting, for at-risk infants and toddlers.

We urge this committee and HB 5572 sponsors to continue to develop comprehensive reach and accountability in home visiting programs across the state.

To this end, we are providing written testimony to point out three main issues for your consideration:

### **1. RETURN ON INVESTMENT**

The foundation of many skills needed for 21<sup>st</sup> century jobs is established in the earliest years of life. Young children's brains develop 700 synapses – neural connections that transmit information and support learning – every second. By age three, a child's brain has reached more than 85 percent of its adult weight. A strong foundation in the early years improves the odds for positive outcomes and a weak foundation increases the odds

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for problems later in life. So, preschool alone is not enough to assure at-risk toddlers get the strong start they need to be ready to learn when they enter kindergarten.

Additional efforts aimed at children aged 0-3 generate significant return on taxpayer investment. Proven home visiting programs, which pair at-risk families with trained professionals who provide vital information and support, are especially important. At-risk children whose parents participate in voluntary home visiting programs have been shown to have higher cognitive, vocabulary, reading and math scores by age six. Over the long term, beneficiaries of home-visiting programs have a higher likelihood of graduating from high school. And mothers in home visiting programs have shorter stays on welfare and better employment prospects. Early childhood programs “do not replace good parenting, rather they help complement and strengthen parenting,” says leading Michigan economist Tim Bartik.

## **2. UNMET NEED IN MICHIGAN**

Numerous voluntary home visiting programs are now at work in Michigan, including the Maternal Infant Health Program, Early Head Start, Healthy Families America, Nurse Family Partnerships, and Parents as Teachers. Altogether, Michigan spends about \$21 million per year on these various home visiting programs. Yet many thousands of at-risk infants and toddlers and their families are not benefitting from these programs. The various home visiting programs serve approximately 31,000 Michigan families per year, yet there are 350,000 Michigan children aged 0-5 who live in low-income families.

To help address this unmet need, we think it is fundamental to assure all home-visiting programs and services are evidence-based, include program metrics and reporting systems, and ultimately allow state policymakers to provide the strongest taxpayer return by investing in programs which are both cost-effective and have clearly documented positive results.

## **3. LEADING APPROACHES**

In encouraging policymakers to develop more comprehensive 0-3 policy in Michigan, we encourage you to consider what some other states are doing. Illinois, for example, dedicates 20 percent of some \$380 million in annual early childhood funding directly to programs for at-risk infants and toddlers. Nebraska developed a \$60 million public-private endowment for programs for at-risk infants and toddlers. And Kansas uses tobacco settlement and other revenues for an early childhood block grant, with one-third of the funds specifically dedicated to programs for at-risk infants and toddlers.

In conclusion, as you consider HB 5572, we urge you to consider it a beginning point, rather than a final destination, in terms of comprehensive statewide early childhood strategy. The business case for comprehensive early childhood programs and expanded home visiting is clear – strong early childhood programs are a promising pathway if we want to assure that at-risk children have every opportunity to grow into high-performance learners, and, ultimately, highly talented workers in Michigan’s future economy.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

*Debbie Dingell*

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